

**DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION
OFFICE OF INFORMATION**

DATA QUALITY INITIATIVES

The Office of Information (OI) Office of Health Data and Informatics serves veterans and health information management professionals by managing and analyzing data vital for patient care -- making health information accessible to health care providers across the entire system when needed most. An important component of OI is the VHA Data Quality Program.

The Data Quality Program oversees a broad range of initiatives and works in concert with other project teams and program offices. Data Quality staff provide guidance, information and expertise about data, data content and assist in eliminating causes of defective data, data standards and historical context of data for national databases. Data Quality staff directly participates to ensure that VHA's Master Patient Index (MPI) national database is maintained, reviewed and enhanced to provide timely, accurate and meaningful patient data and that patient information is available to support clinical and administrative decision-making. The availability of consistent and accurate patient data affects patient care, VHA research, epidemiology, outcomes and statistical analysis, financial and strategic planning, billing and reimbursement, evaluation of quality of care, and communication to support the patient's treatment.

Six principles guide data quality efforts in VHA: 1) data and business strategy are connected; 2) critical information chains, from data creation to use, are identified and managed for multidisciplinary (cross) functions; 3) decision-making and business planning are based on information which is derived from data; 4) management responsibilities for data are clearly defined; 5) the organization has a focused, internal data quality program; and 6) technology plays a supportive role in the data quality process. Updates on VHA data quality activities are available at <http://vaww.vhaco.va.gov/dataquality>.

One focus of the Data Quality Program relates to the use and data quality of the VHA MPI, which is used to uniquely identify patient's system-wide. The MPI Data Quality Coordination Workgroup identifies potential implementation strategies for various projects, technical issues that impact the MPI System, and those systems with which it interacts, and provides a forum to discuss other projects that involve the use of MPI data or integration with the MPI. The workgroup has representatives from Health Data and Informatics and the MPI Data Quality Project lead (HDI/MPIDQ), System Design and Development (SD&D), Enterprise VistA Support (EVS), as well as the Health Eligibility Center (HEC) within the Business Office (CBO), and medical center staff responsible for MPI-related concerns. Issues currently being addressed by this workgroup include: definition of strategies for incorporation and use of the unique MPI identifier within other VHA databases, including the Health Data Repository (HDR) as well as the Clinical and Health Data Repository (C/HDR) projects; promulgation of defined standards; and determination of the long-term impact of merging patient records on miscellaneous databases and prevention of catastrophic edits of data. Minutes and related workgroup documents are posted at the web site noted above.

A critical element of data quality efforts is data standardization. The Data Quality Team is an active participant in the newly formed Data Standardization Program, and along with its review and approval functions, is shaping its role even further to assist in preparation for future standardization work. In addition to this internal program, VHA interacts with all federal agencies in the Consolidated Health Informatics (CHI) initiative, in particular numerous partners within the Department of Defense (DoD) and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). CHI was established to foster adoption of federal interoperability standards related to healthcare as part of a joint strategy for developing an electronic health record. This initiative has endorsed the use of many standards including the LOINC® laboratory terminology; Health Level 7 Versions 2.3 and higher; XML Enabled; X12 EDI transaction sets in support of HIPAA regulations; NCPDP SCRIPT for electronic retail pharmacy transactions; the IEEE 1073 interfacing standard; SNOMED CT terminologies; and the DICOM imaging standard, among others. Formal adoption and integration of standards such as these will facilitate broader implementation of standards throughout the organization and federal government, help VHA meet legislative requirements, enable more efficient system development and day-to-day business operations, and support health information sharing between VHA and its business partners. Ongoing standardization initiatives are continuing with DoD in the form of the Consolidated Health Data Repository (CHDR) effort, where information maintained on DoD's clinical system will be accessible by the HDR, permitting the sharing of data to better serve the veteran community.